

Bernie Sanders: A “socialist” promoted by the US government

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A remarkable profile of Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders was published Tuesday on the web site of the Voice of America, the official news service of the US government. The report was headlined, “Bernie Sanders Surge Reflects US Shift on Socialism,” and it described his campaign in largely favorable terms.

“Sanders is experiencing an unexpected wave of popularity,” the article stated, “and is drawing some of the largest, most electric crowds of any presidential candidate so far... Sanders is now running a solid second to the Democratic frontrunner, former secretary of state Hillary Clinton. In some polls, he has even taken the lead.”

The VOA report focuses on the question of Sanders’ “self-identification as a socialist,” calling it “a rarity for politicians in the United States, which, unlike most other Western democracies, does not have any sort of significant socialist presence represented on its political left wing.”

The article continues: “Since the Cold War, the term has become something of a dirty word in US politics: a phrase used not just as a description of a political and economic system, but as an insult used by conservatives in an attempt to tarnish the reputation of their left-leaning rivals.”

The VOA then asks the question, “Does Sanders’ newfound mainstream popularity suggest Americans are changing their views on socialism?” Its response is, “For many younger Americans, that appears to be the case.” The article goes on to cite a recent Gallup poll showing that 69 percent of Americans ages 18 to 29 would consider voting for a socialist presidential candidate, compared to a figure of 47 percent for all ages.

The report concludes by identifying the politics of

Sanders with social democratic reformism of the Scandinavian variety, and cites, among others, Noam Chomsky, who characterizes the Vermont senator’s politics as those of “a New Deal Democrat.”

There is nothing original or surprising in this promotion of the Sanders campaign—except its source. The Voice of America is the official media organ of the US government for addressing foreign audiences, funded by Congress for 75 years. It originated as the Office of War Information during the Second World War. It was then renamed VOA and largely focused on Soviet bloc countries during the Cold War.

So notorious were the lies spread by the VOA during this period that it was formally banned from broadcasting back to the United States, in the name of protecting the American people from government “propaganda” (as well as concealing from the American people the lies being broadcast as justification for the wars and coups sponsored by American imperialism around the world).

In the post-Cold War period, VOA has been retargeted to the Muslim countries of North Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia, where it has served as an apologist for the US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, the regime-change operation in Libya and the ongoing drone warfare throughout the region.

The question that arises is why such an agency, dedicated to spreading propaganda for American imperialism and covering up its crimes, should adopt such a friendly tone towards a US presidential candidate claiming to be a socialist. The answer is obvious: this “socialist” is not an opponent of American imperialism in the slightest.

Sanders has minor differences with the foreign policy of the Obama administration, but nothing that in any way calls into question his allegiance to the economic,

military and strategic interests of the US ruling elite. On the contrary, a major theme of his campaign is a strident economic nationalism, directed primarily against China, which has become the main target for Pentagon war planning under Obama's "pivot to Asia."

The VOA profile is not an aberration, but part of a generally favorable treatment of Sanders by the Obama administration, the Democratic Party establishment, the corporate-controlled media and even a section of the "billionaire class" whose domination of American political life Sanders claims to oppose.

White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest commented on the Sanders campaign at the end of a September 3 briefing. In response to a question, he said, "I think the president has in the past spoken positively about Senator Sanders and certainly his service in the United States Senate. He is somebody who over the last several months, as all of you have noted, has been able to attract large, fired-up crowds of Democrats. That's a good thing for the party."

In a similar vein, Vice President Joseph Biden, who is considering a late entry into the presidential race to challenge Hillary Clinton, told a Labor Day rally in Pittsburgh that Sanders was "doing a hell of a job" in his unexpectedly strong campaign for the Democratic nomination.

As for support from billionaires, Sanders has the enthusiastic backing of Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak (who in the past contributed to Howard Dean, Ron Paul and Barack Obama), and the professed admiration of investor Warren Buffett, a supporter of Hillary Clinton and the second-richest man in America.

"I think Bernie Sanders has been a terrific campaigner," Buffett told CNBC Tuesday. "I think he's run a model campaign. He's not going to get elected, but I admire him."

These tributes to Sanders are another yardstick for measuring the cynicism and perfidy of pseudo-left groups like the International Socialist Organization and Socialist Alternative, which hail the Sanders campaign as a genuine insurgency against the corporate domination of the US political system.

The most recent such effusion from Socialist Alternative, under the headline, "We Need to Organize Against the Billionaire Class!" appeared on the group's website September 7, one day before the VOA profile and the praise for Sanders from Buffett.

Socialist Alternative declares, "To win this election, much less fundamental change, the movement behind Sanders will need to rely on its own strength and build an independent political force to the corporate-controlled Democratic Party establishment."

The statement indicates that if Sanders wins the nomination, Socialist Alternative will support the Democratic Party presidential ticket. If Clinton is the nominee, Socialist Alternative appeals to "Bernie" not to support her, but to "run as an independent all the way to the general election in November 2016 and help to build an independent political voice for the 99%."

Socialist Alternative issues this statement knowing full well that Sanders is irrevocably committed to support the Democratic Party and Clinton if she is the nominee. Only a week before, he appeared before the summer meeting of the Democratic National Committee to offer the services of his "movement" in delivering an electoral victory for the Democrats in 2016.

It is fitting, in a sense, that Socialist Alternative publishes its latest pro-Sanders declaration only one day before his flattering profile by the Voice of America. This organization is just as much an instrument of American imperialism as the paid propagandists at VOA.



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